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Proposed New Plan Devastating to Thousands of Local Communities

**Clinton/Gore Forest Road Policy
Blueprint for Disaster**

President Clinton's recently announced "no roads" policy for 40 million acres of National Forest System land amounts to a royal edict declaring Washington the ultimate arbiter on the use of federally owned land. The message Clinton is sending says simply that states, local governments, and citizens are incapable of making intelligent decisions about the use of forest land. Rather, it suggests that a "one size fits all" federally mandated program is appropriate public policy.

With 35 million acres of Forest Service Land already officially "roadless" and formally designated as "wilderness" by statute, the President proposes that an additional 40 million acres *effectively* be managed as "wilderness" — bringing the total to 75 million acres, or 39 percent of the 192-million-acre Forest Service estate. And, the Forest Service isn't the only federal agency managing Wilderness lands: counting all of the federal Wilderness land (just in the continental United States) designated by Congress over the past three and half decades and administered by various federal agencies, the President's plan effectively *doubles the amount of land now deemed "off limits" to most people and uses*. And it was all done suddenly and by edict. Senator Ron Wyden, the Democratic senator from Oregon, one of the nation's largest public lands states, had this to say to Gannett News Service the day of the announcement: "This is really unprecedented . . . I've been working on forest issues in the House and Senate for 20 years, and I've never seen an administration that keeps people in the dark like these people do."

Here's why Congress should be concerned about the President's proposal:

- The President is locking people out of public lands under the pretense the land needs such protection, and locking people out of the decision-making process related to the land's use.
- The President is side-stepping the Congress and the planning process mandated by the 1964 Wilderness Act and the 1978 National Forest Management Act.

While the President takes an elitist approach, the issue is really about *public* access to *public* land. President Clinton's proposal likely will resolve nothing in the ongoing battle between national environmental organizations like the Sierra Club and other interested users over how our

forests are used and managed. Instead, it will worsen the current confusion by imposing a template for individual forest management created in and managed from Washington, D.C.

The President's announcement is nothing short of a blueprint for disaster: in addition to the points made above, this plan will place greater strains on rural western economies, limit recreation opportunities, increase dependence on foreign forest products thereby threatening forest systems abroad, and further endanger forest ecosystems threatened by insect infestation or wild fire.

One of Every Four Acres in the U.S. is Federally Owned

Public lands issues affect thousands of communities and millions of citizens. Slightly more than one of every four acres in the United States — or 657 million acres (29 percent) — are owned by the federal government. The majority of the federal lands (92 percent) are in 12 western states. In fact, the federal government owns more than half of the land in those 12 states (ranging from 27 percent in Washington to 83 percent in Nevada). The bulk of the holdings are entrusted to the National Park Service (77 million acres), the Bureau of Land Management (274 million acres), the National Wildlife Refuge System (93 million acres), and the National Forest System (192 million acres). Forest System lands are concentrated in 12 western states but the Forest Service manages more than half of all federal lands in the eastern United States.

Congress Created the National Wilderness Preservation System

The 1964 Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577) created the National Wilderness Preservation System: it defines wilderness as federal land that is primarily affected by the forces of nature, relatively untouched by human activity. Agencies can recommend areas for designation as wilderness, but *only Congress* can designate areas as part of the Wilderness System. Section 4(c) specifically prohibits most businesses and commercial resource exploitation (such as timber harvest and mining) and mechanized entry (i.e. cars, trucks, off-road vehicles, mountain bikes, aircraft, or motorized boats) except in emergencies.

"Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act and, except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act . . . , there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area."

Currently the Wilderness System is composed of nearly 104 million acres of federal land, 55 percent of which is in Alaska. The National Park Service administers 43 million acres, the Bureau of Land Management administers 5 million acres, the Fish and Wildlife Service administers 21 million acres, and the Forest Service manages 35 million acres of Wilderness.

In enacting the 1964 Act, which created an initial 9.1 million acres of Wilderness, and subsequent legislation adding to the National Wilderness System, Congress explicitly recognized

that certain lands should be accorded special treatment and protection. Congress also explicitly withheld to itself the power to designate wilderness status.

Clinton Proposal Relies on Top-Down Management

The Clinton Administration pays lip service to the notion that local governments, citizens and local interests can reach compromises on the use of Forest Service lands in and around their communities. At the beginning of his second term, the President declared the era of Big Government to be "over." His recent announcement on Forest Land management flatly contradicts that notion: his approach will please national environmentalist groups and certain eastern liberal factions, but it will do little or nothing to solve the nagging economic problems facing public-land-dependent communities in the western United States when use of those lands is severely limited.

Recently members of a community in Northern California, called the Quincy Library Group, developed a local consensus approach to managing surrounding Forest Service land. Congress had to intervene to create the opportunity for the local process to work because mainstream environmental organizations, like the Sierra Club, and the Clinton Administration were reluctant to allow such a creative and responsible approach. Quincy is illustrative of the current problem whereby Forest Service lands have been in limbo for such a long time due to the notion that all lands must be managed the same way — according to a formula developed in Washington.

Rather than the top-down management solution offered by the Clinton/Gore Administration, we should encourage the formation of local user groups to develop solutions to their unique circumstances.

Forest Service Side-Steps Congress with "Roadless" Designations

Despite Congress's sole authority to designate wilderness lands, the Forest Service over the past 34 years has been managing other lands as *de facto* wilderness by declaring them to be "primitive" or "roadless." This action closes that land to public use, including most recreational uses and resource development.

In 1971 the Forest Service began a comprehensive evaluation — the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I) — to identify those of its lands that might be recommended to Congress for Wilderness designation. In 1973 and 1974, the federal courts limited the Forest Service's ability to develop any roadless areas prior to Congress' disposition of the RARE I recommendations. As a consequence, millions of acres remained unavailable to any sort of economic use — even to recreation.

The Carter Administration in 1977 ordered a second review, RARE II, that proved controversial and, ultimately, disastrous. RARE II — which is remarkably similar to President Clinton's October 13, 1999 announcement — was invalidated by the federal courts in 1980 largely because a single, nationwide Environmental Impact Statement (as Clinton has proposed) was determined not to be specific enough to govern individual land-use allocations.

Congress subsequently tried to deal with the RARE II mess by passing state-specific wilderness bills, and releasing the "roadless" areas not designated as wilderness for multiple-use purposes to be determined by individual national forest plans. However, release of these areas for multiple uses has not occurred. Individual National Forest Plans have been bogged down by controversy and litigation. Virtually none of the "roadless" areas not designated as wilderness has been entered during the ensuing years for commercial purposes of any kind, including many forms of recreation.

Because of this history, the President's proposal really amounts to nothing more than maintaining the status quo, and will resolve nothing. Instead, it will continue the current confusion by imposing a template for individual forest management created in and managed from Washington, D.C. Curiously, this is exactly the outcome many in the major environmental groups will like. If they can't have more Congressionally designated wilderness, then they will settle for the legal and policy uncertainties imposed on these lands when managed as *defacto* wilderness or simply left in management limbo.

Active Management is Necessary to Protect Our Forests

Our forests are dynamic systems constantly changing in response to both natural and man-made events. They must be protected from insect infestation, invasive species, and susceptibility to catastrophic fire damage. Without access, active management is impossible and unhealthy forests is the result. By the Forest Service's own admission, more than 26 million acres of national forest land are at high risk of catastrophic fires; currently, the cost of firefighting on national forests averages close to a billion dollars annually. Instead of leaving large quantities of land unmanaged as the President's plan would have us do, we should provide access, via roads, in order to maintain forest health.

While the Clinton Administration is correct in its assertion that a small portion of our wood product needs are met by cutting trees in National Forests, the Administration neglects to acknowledge that restrictions on cutting are recent and imposed under its watch. Rather than completely neglecting the forest lands, as the Administration suggests, managers can keep a forest healthy through the use of selective cutting and removal of dead or dying trees. Such management also provides a beneficial economic use of the land.

The Clinton Administration has made it clear on any number of occasions that it wants to "decouple" rural communities from federal lands by eliminating beneficial uses such as grazing, mining, and timber production and some forms of recreation, such as snowmobiling. Yet completely removing any genuine economic connection between the communities and the surrounding federal land will cause severe economic harm because some counties in the west are nearly surrounded by federal land.

U.S. forest management practices on private and government land are without doubt the best in the world from both a productive point of view and an environmental-protection perspective. Without productive use of the National Forest System to help meet some of our forest product needs, we increasingly will turn to imports. As we increase our reliance on forest product

imports, we should recognize that products may be coming from parts of the world where environmental protection is at best a low priority.

The Clinton Administration maintains that lands should be roadless to protect the quality of water flowing from the 40 million acres proposed for protection. Yet our forests should not be managed solely for their value as a watershed. They should be managed for a variety of reasons and uses. A healthy forest serves to protect water quality. A forest that is fundamentally unstable due to insect devastation or repeated catastrophic fires will, on the other hand, adversely affect water quality.

The President's Proposal is "Double-Talk"

The President's elitist approach contradicts the words of Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck in a speech he made last March:

"The final piece of our agenda recognizes that recreation is the fastest growing use of national forests and grasslands. It provides the link — a window through which an increasingly urban society can enjoy and appreciate the natural world. Forest Service managed lands provide more outdoor recreation opportunities than anywhere else in the United States. . . . Our recreation agenda will focus on four key areas. First, providing quality settings and experiences. Second, focusing on customer service and satisfaction. Third, emphasizing community outreach. Fourth, strengthening relationships with partners, communities, and others."

Wilderness designation, or keeping an area roadless, serves a valuable but limited purpose. But consider that just 2 percent of those who use public lands do so in designated Wilderness areas. Effectively doubling the acreage in the continental United States treated as "wilderness" will not, as the President suggests "offer unparalleled opportunities for hikers, hunters and anglers." These very uses the President references depend largely on the public's ability to access remote areas through the forest road system. Most hikers, hunters, snowmobilers, skiers, and anglers need roads to get close to the areas they wish to use.

If Chief Dombeck is right, public use of forests will grow over the coming years, and greater, not reduced, access will be necessary.

Who Really Cares About the National Forests?

President Clinton compares himself to President Theodore Roosevelt, yet Roosevelt once said that "...conservation means development as much as it means preservation." Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service, offered this sentiment, "... the greatest good for the greatest number over the long run."

What is the relationship between the national forests and the local communities? At the dawn of the 19th century, Gifford Pinchot wrote *The Use of the National Forests*. In it he said:

"What happens to county taxes? People who are unfamiliar with the laws about National Forests often argue that they work hardships on the counties in which they lie by withdrawing a great deal of land from taxation. . . . The National Government of course pays no taxes. But it does something better. It pays those counties in which the forests are located 10 percent of all the receipts from the sale of timber, use of the range, and various other uses, and it does this every year. It is a sure and steady income, because the resources of National Forests are used in such a way that they keep coming without a break. . . ." (pp. 12-13).

Yet under the President's proposed roadless area plan, the interests of those who truly care about our forests, those who live in and near them, are ignored. The President claims his plan is not an attempt to "turn our national forests into museums," but that precisely will be its outcome.

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